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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A CLERGYMAN IN FRANCE

SIR,—The enclosed is a copy of a letter recently received by me from France. The writer is a young clergyman who for the past eight or ten years has done excellent missionary work, especially among the negroes in one of our Eastern cities. He volunteered early in the past winter as chaplain to our forces, was accepted, and soon sailed abroad. He feels so deeply the dreadfulness of the conflict that perhaps his letter should be reproduced for a general reading.

NEWPORT, R. I.

HENRY BARTON JACOBS.

MY DEAR DR. JACOBS:

. . . . It is one of the joys of being over here to be freed from dependence upon the reports of commissions concerning the vileness of the Boche, and get the facts first hand—and then, when you get them, if you are a normal human being, they sear your soul, and your religion is expanded to the inclusion of a contempt and loathing for them that is beyond anything else you had before, or else you lose your religion. Fortunately, mine has expanded, and I am willing to add a clause of belief in the extinction of the Boche, and regard it as orthodox and as necessary for my soul's salvation as other great truths of our religion. . . . All that you have heard in America about them does not approximate the truth. There *are* little children right here in France with their little stumps of hands—there were some not far from my last camp, and young men with all the fingers of their right hand cut off. The other day a British officer and three Tommies told me that a short time ago they went as an advance party into a little village from which the Boche had been driven back, and in a large room there were four young Canadians crucified—one on each wall of the room. Also, when I was with the British they told me that the Boche had taken young Belgian and French girls into their front-line trenches and tortured them until their screams made the Scotch and the Canadians so crazed that they would go over into the machine-gun nests which the Boche had set up, using the women's screams as a decoy. And I have it on the word of a British officer that they have stood—the officers—with guns levelled at their men to keep them from going over when the women scream, and being needlessly slaughtered. I cannot tell you what the soldiers told me they found when they drove the hell fiends out of one of these positions—it is too awful to think about it. I also have it on the word of one of the greatest French abbés that the Boche were especially instructed to destroy convents, and kill or outrage the nuns, and he says that all through France and Belgium are ruined convents, and that the nuns were given to the soldiers to be outraged in the camps. These are not isolated cases, nor abnormal conditions which prevailed here and there where troops were drunk or without any moral restraint. Go along the French and British front, and the only conclusion you arrive at is that they are just the ground principle of Boche efficiency in action.

I don't believe there is one of us here who would not be glad to be at home; but there is not one of us here, I believe, who does not want to see Boche and devastated from one end to the other, with Berlin a blackened ruin, and with the Boche exterminated, militarists and all, before we come home. There is a French postcard which shows two tired, weary poilus standing knee-deep

in the mud of the trenches. One says, "If they only hold out." The other says, "Who?" He answers, "The civilians." . . . We must get harder—the kind of hardness that our dear Lord showed when He set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem—the kind of hardness He showed when He refused the stupefying drink on the Cross—the kind of hardness that saw clearly all the suffering ahead, and met it unflinchingly, yes, greeted it and grasped it as the very end and aim of life. And it is only when you in America are ready and eager to suffer—and to accept suffering as the source of strength and the inspiration and end of national life—then and then only can we have hope of winning the war, and then and then only can we feel that America is ready to stand fast, to pay the cost—and be worthy of the victory. . . .

I would like to know how the French regard some of us, and the impression they make—something like a yokel's first appearance in a drawing-room, in some cases, I am afraid. The average American soldier is so adaptable and so resourceful—very much like one of these Swiss pocket knives—something for every emergency. The poilu likes him, and he is very chummy with the poilu, and gets on well wherever he goes. The French admire him and his courage, and they work together as one nation. I am billeted here in what is left of something that was once home for some poor old souls. In the remnants of an old building next to me there is an old French woman—nearly ninety. She ought to have gone long ago, but she hangs on because it has been home, and there isn't anything left for her but memories. Her son was one of the imperishables of Verdun, and she lives mostly in the past when she is not in heaven. Yet as we sit together and warm ourselves before the little fire I catch some of the spirit of France—and she says the Boche cannot pass, as they said at Verdun; and she says *Le Bon Dieu* will soon send the showers and sunshine to revive the drooping fleur-de-lis of France. And sometimes, when I am groping, I am glad to take her hand and be led out of the darkness to the impregnable heights of her faith in God and His care for France. When things are very lively (there is an old wine cellar in the barnyard when the Boche are out for murder) she says "*Le Bon Dieu—Le Bon Dieu*" and it means everything. The *Good God*—for she has found the only thing that stands, and I think of her in her utter desolation in connection with what St. Paul said "as having nothing and yet possessing all things." But here I am starting another preaching.

Did you ever go through an air raid? I am sure you haven't yet—and I hope you never will. They are hard to describe. The Boche buzzard comes over in the day time to find out where you are, but at a great height, to keep out of the way of the French eagles; and then when it is dark, or on a bright moonlight night—when he is invisible—he comes back for his dirty work. You stand in the most obscure place you can locate temporarily—you are quite sure you are the one he is looking for—and there is the same feeling of unlooked-for and unwished-for publicity that you would feel if you were on the stage of the Lyric speaking, and suddenly discovered that your garter had dropped down over your shoe. There is always a good deal of noise—the tout ensemble is quite indescribable; but you would get some idea if you could take all the thunderstorms of a lifetime, with eight or nine earthquakes, adding a dozen or two Kansas cyclones, and while such an atmospheric disturbance was going on imagine yourself in a small canoe in the centre of Chesapeake Bay; then you would get some idea of the sensation. But the joy of joys is when the French eagle gets his beak in the Boche Buzzard—and he does it, thank God, he does it!

. . . The honor of the American soldier over here will be, for us who have seen him fight, and go out, the most glorious memory of our whole experience. Let us all try to live up to it. . . .

G. A. G.,
5th Field Artillery, A. E. F., France.

"DOING FAIRLY WELL"

SIR,—I came across, in your June number, the article, "The Jew Is Not a Slacker," by Lewis P. Brown.

I agree with the thought that is expressed in the title, but the contents of the article do not bear out the idea that the writer wished to con-